

**Reading LRA
Public Meeting
Wednesday, March 4, 2009
Council Chambers
5:00 p.m.
Meeting Report**

Committee Members Attending: V. Spencer, S. Marmarou, S. Fuhs,
E. Rafaelli, J. Knockstead, M. Ballas, S. Fuhs,

Staff attending: L. Kelleher, Point of Contact; E. Swiger, Swiger Consulting, Inc.

Others Attending: F. Vecchio & T. Chapman - Reading School District, C. Folk - Mary's Shelter, M. Bernosky - Berks Women in Crisis (BWIC); K. Wrobel Reading Hospital

Vaughn D. Spencer, Chair, called the Reading Local Redevelopment Authority (LRA) to order at 5 p.m. and introduced Mr. Swiger to those present. Mr. Swiger stated that he is the team leader for the consulting group retained by the LRA to complete various studies that will culminate in the creation of a reuse plan for the Navy Marine Reserve Center parcel.

Assessment of Community Meeting

Mr. Swiger stated that despite the inclement weather there was great turnout at the meeting. He noted the extensive outreach the LRA provided to inform the affected community about this meeting. He stated that the community is well engaged and provided important input. He added that the consulting team was not surprised with the nature of the feedback.

Review of March 4th Site Visit

Mr. Swiger stated that members of the consulting team made a site visit today to review the various components of the facility such as structural, mechanical, traffic, environmental, etc. He noted that due to the snow covered grounds one review component was delayed. Mr. Deller, from C.S. Davidson, will be reviewing the grounds and will reschedule after the existing snow is no longer present. He stated that this site visit will result in the facilities report to be issued near the end of March.

Overview of Economic Development & Community Needs Assessment

Mr. Swiger explained the economic and residential composition of the area represents the whole of Reading. He noted the need for the reuse plan to provide for job creation that will support the surrounding area. He also noted the need to make this property ratable, if possible.

Mr. Swiger stated that Attorney Barry Steinberg, from Kutock Rock, has reviewed the NOIs. From his assessment the Reading Hospital NOI is the only proposal that could restore the ratability of this parcel. The Reading Hospital proposes to use the parcel for either dormitory or administrative office space.

Mr. Swiger described Mr. Flynn's review of the economic development issues for this parcel, noting the many interviews conducted by Mr. Flynn. Due to the current economic crisis and the decline in the sale of residential properties, it was unlikely that residential reuse is possible. Also as the parcel is somewhat small in size it is not conducive for new home construction, unless a high-rise condominium is considered. However, Mr. Flynn did suggest that the LRA consider the following uses:

- Special Care Facilities that could include senior cottages
- Business Incubator
- Health Care Training facility

In response to a question Mr. Swiger explained the business incubator function. Ms. Kelleher noted the example in the Cumberland Valley

Mr. Swiger warned of the need for the LRA's careful consideration of the plan due to the weakened economy. He stated that after the facilities assessment is completed the consulting team can begin developing a draft reuse plan for the LRA's consideration. He stated that the facilities assessment will be completed and ready for review at the end of March. Ms. Kelleher requested that the plan be provided in electronic form so it can be uploaded on the LRA webpage.

Mr. Fuhs inquired if any further environmental testing can be performed. Mr. Swiger replied negatively. He stated that Ms. Kelleher inquired about an OEA/DoD grant for environmental testing but learned that funding is not available.

Mr. Marmarou asked Mr. Swiger if Mr. Flynn spoke with representatives from the State Police about the future of the State Police Barracks across the street from

the Navy Marine facility and to gain their input about the reuse of the Navy Marine facility parcel. Mr. Swiger stated that is believed that the State Police Barracks are under utilized at this point in time. The State Police Barracks sit on a 30 acre site.

NOI Review

Mr. Swiger reported that Attorney Steinberg has finished reviewing the NOIS submitted. The final assessment of the NOIs can occur after the facility assessment is completed. Mr. Swiger noted Attorney Steinberg's suggestion for the LRA to issue those who submitted a NOI a letter requesting additional information concerning their ability to fund the their proposed project, respond to the environmental issues, etc. Answers to these questions are critical to the evaluation of the proposal submitted. He reminded the LRA that the federal government requires that the implementation of the proposed project within a defined period of time. The LRA directed Ms. Kelleher to issue the letters requested by Mr. Swiger. As the responses are needed before the NOIs can be evaluated in full, the LRA agreed to impose a 30 day response time.

Mr. Fuhs inquired if only three NOIs were submitted. Ms. Kelleher responded affirmatively.

Mr. Swiger expressed his appreciation for the cooperation and responsiveness of the Reading LRA, LRA staff, the DoD-OEA, along with the Navy and Marines.

Dr. Chapman, representing the Reading School District, inquired if the LRA has determined a date of final decision. Mr. Swiger replied that the decision date is unknown as the facilities assessment has not been drafted.

Mr. Knockstead inquired when the LRA will hold its next public meeting. Mr. Swiger stated that the next public meeting will occur after the draft reuse plan has been presented and reviewed by the LRA. He noted that the LRA has the ability to request amendment of the draft reuse plan prepared by the consultants. The public meeting can occur after this process is completed. Ms. Kelleher requested that at least three weeks of lead time be provided for the public meeting.

Mr. Marmarou questioned the prior existence of an outdoor firing range. Mr. Swiger stated that although it is believed that an outdoor range was used in the 1950's and early 60's there is no documentation to support the belief. He explained that original plans for the building cannot be located. The only

drawings and plans that exist are after 1980. Ms. Kelleher reminded everyone that the federal government is not required to adhere to local regulations.

Mr. Swiger announced the need for the LRA to meet in an executive session to discuss parcel acquisition and disposition issues at the conclusion of the meeting. He explained that the executive session was requested by Attorney Steinberg. As no further business was brought forward, the Reading LRA meeting was adjourned at 5:25 p.m. The executive session concluded at approximately 5:55 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by
Linda A. Kelleher CMC, City Clerk
Ernest Swiger, Swiger Consulting, Inc.*